

INTRICACIES OF FORMULATING AVIATION TRAINING STRATEGIES IN A
COMMUNITY OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES
– THE CASE OF SADC

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ABSTRACT

The Southern African development Community (SADC) comprises fourteen countries whose air transport sectors vary in size, characteristics and sophistication - it is easier for the more advanced air transport systems to meet their responsibility in ensuring safe operations than it is for others. Since air transport plays a key, supporting role in implementing the objectives of SADC, to operate safe and reliable air transport services the whole of SADC must maintain world class and seamless safety standards on their civil aviation systems. This requires that individual countries and the region as a whole maintain high aviation standards and procedures, adequate facilities and equipment, and competent personnel. This paper confines itself into discussing one aspect of these prerequisites: the issues that relate to establishing common approaches in aviation training.

The paper highlights the issues that SADC has to address to successfully integrate the aviation training activities of the whole region. Amongst these are the need to establish common entrance requirements for tertiary institutes and the language problem. The paper also explicates SADC's approach to optimizing the use of training facilities and

instructors. It cites as one of the strategies explored the need to establish a network of aviation schools that would specialize in some aspects of training and support one another. The objectives of the network are to:

- ◆ Ensure consistent quality training,
- ◆ Minimize duplication,
- ◆ Afford cost effective training,
- ◆ Create sufficient volume of students,
- ◆ Make training feasible within the region,
- ◆ Achieve international and ICAO accreditation,
- ◆ Afford ab initio training to all countries,
- ◆ Harmonized standards and course material.

The need for creating stakeholder partnerships in formulating aviation training policies and strategies and in their implementation is also highlighted with special emphasis in involving the private sector from both SADC and abroad.

INTRODUCTION

Global changes in the world economy continue to demand more efficiency and rope tight strategies in the civil aviation industry. This reshapes the workplace: the airports, the hangars, the administrative block, the

booking offices, the cockpit and the control tower; demanding more professionalism, productivity, knowledge and high skills from both the managerial and technical staff.

While the world is undergoing such changes, in Southern Africa, fourteen countries have joined themselves together to form the Southern African Development Community (SADC) whose main objective is to co-operate among themselves to develop their countries and improve their economies. In this endeavour air transport is a key vehicle for movement of people and goods within the boundaries of SADC region and with the rest of the world. It is also one of the engines for trade and economic development. For that reason the region is very determined to provide efficient and safe air transport services.

The air transport industry in the region is still young with minimal air transport activities but a promising industry that is deemed to keep pace with global developments of the industry. SADC, therefore, finds itself not only challenged by these global developments but also by its own underdevelopment and the need to get out of this appalling situation.

In order to develop, the civil aviation industry requires competent, productive and adequately prepared human resources. This makes the enhancement of human resources development paramount on the regional agenda.

SADC TRAINING ISSUES

The SADC aviation HRD issues are dominated by different educational systems and cover a

wide spectrum of areas: shortage of experts, instructors and training institutions; different tertiary institution entrance requirements; different languages of instruction; and different levels of technical advancement. There is a shortage of experts in almost all civil aviation technical and management areas, which is more critical in some individual countries. Different countries have different pre university education systems making it difficult to adopt the same syllabus for the tertiary education. The region is divided between three foreign languages and several local languages that are used as a means of communication and as media of education in schools and at the university.

There is a need, therefore, to establish a common route to similar university entrance requirements as a basis for entrance to tertiary institutions. The region has to train intensively to increase the number of experts and their knowledge of the modern civil aviation processes. These cannot be achieved without enhancing the capacity of training institutions through optimizing the capabilities of the existing and new institutions that might be necessary. They also necessitate adoption of similar syllabi and uniformity in tertiary education. How to harmonize training and facilitate manpower exchange or pooling becomes a key issue in formulating HRD strategies in SADC.

These issues are compounded by the fact that the global civil aviation arena is undergoing very fast changes in technology, expertise,

management techniques and innovation. Increased air transport activities and the need to enhance both aviation safety and operational efficiency motivate these changes. Furthermore, whenever these basic issues are addressed, the outcome are new safety related systems, (like the CNS/ATM system) and techniques which in their turn require more training for the new facilities and equipment. When all these issues are combined SADC to frog leap in HRD in its manpower development approaches and it has to invest a lot of money in the undertaking. The individual SADC countries do not have that kind of money which makes the HRD issues a regional endeavour that is difficult for even the region together to resolve alone within its boundaries and resources. The region has to seek partners to help it address the issue.

SADC TRAINING VISION

Unless the aviation experts receive similar training and same qualification it will continue to be difficult to use them commonly and therefore pool this important resource in the region. Similar training and qualification will also make it easier to exchange human resources, establish commonality in equipment and establish common licensing mechanisms. This should make it possible to establish a pyramidal network of civil aviation training institutes to cover both ab-initio and advanced programs and executive development. It will facilitate a common syllabus and examinations and joint ventures in training in general.

The expected outcome is co-operative HRD programs, network

of Common schools with pyramidal structure to get all countries involved, strategic international training partners, creation of management experts and HRD consultants, empowered champion of change among employees.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Education Systems

Every country pursued primary and secondary education and trained its experts alone hoping that at the end the level of expertise would be compatible. There are different approaches to primary and secondary education at which the future aviation experts are prepared. Entrance to university and other tertiary institutes of education also vary: some countries accept o-levels grades, others require an additional one year study after o-levels whilst others strictly require A-levels. This applies to countries that use English as the media of university education. The French speaking countries have yet another system. These background differences highlight the difficulties that could be encountered in setting similar ab-initio aviation courses; and call for a bridging education orientation that should be conducted at the aviation schools.

The bridging class should be preferable to trying to establish the same system of education from primary education in the whole of SADC. The differences in the medium of instruction apart, in different countries the spoken language is more diverse than the three foreign languages of English, Portuguese and French. At lower classes these

languages would have to be learnt whereas the medium of instruction used is the local languages.

The regional human resource development strategy has to address the issue common approach to primary and secondary education to ensure that at the end of the day newly recruited aviation trainees would have received similar and adequate education to cope with the training that lies in front of them.

Training Facilities

The new approach will have to develop from the existing situation. This situation encompasses the existing physical situation of the training elements in terms of availability of trainees, instructors, training schools and material. It also encompasses the regional approach to joint ventures.

When it came to joint ventures within SADC: be they on training, airport development, flight calibration, or any other, the SADC approach has been to assign such a project to a member State and expect that member State to implement it either using its own resources or donor funding. The question of sharing the costs of such an institution was not there although the institution would charge the users for the services rendered when it was ready to provide such services. Therefore, should the individual member State not have the funds to carry out the project and should the donor community not also come to its rescue the project would stall.

In Africa, there were attempts to approach civil aviation

training as a continental endeavor. Two dedicated schools were established for that purpose under the auspices of ICAO but the host countries owned them. Their geographical areas of responsibility were based on language on two languages. The aviation school in Addis Ababa was to train both pilots and engineers for the anglophone countries while that in Mvengue, Gabon was to do the same for francophone countries. The Mvengue School was closed many years ago while that in Addis Ababa survives out of the training requirement of its own country.

Notwithstanding the above arrangement, SADC dedicated the training of its pilots and aviation experts to the Zambian Aviation Services Training Institute (ZASTI). The funding of this school like all the other SADC regional projects was to be made by the host country; in this case Zambia, or from the donor community. The other member States would send there their trainees at their own cost. Other than using the services of the facility they were not involved in its affairs. They did not own it or participate in its management or teaching activities. They would not inject capital to ensure its survival even when it was obvious that the institute needed that. As the institute attracted very little assistance from donor countries, it could not serve the region as was envisaged.

Additionally, most countries had their own low scale, but fully-fledged civil aviation training schools under the Directorates of Civil aviation. All these schools were government owned and had been established with the help of

ICAO. They would essentially run air traffic control and other airport operation courses. Even countries that do not have established civil aviation training schools, do conduct some selected courses with their own or contracted instructors and equipment. Like the Zambian school, almost all the national schools are in dire need of equipment, training aids and instructors and are not properly equipped for the level of new technology training demanded for the next millennium. Some had equipment donated to them by donor countries that they were not using either because they were obsolete or could no longer receive after sale back up from the vendors.

Some SADC countries also use the services of ex-East African Community (EAC) schools that survived the demise of the mother organization. These include the East African Flying School in Uganda and the East African School of Aviation in Kenya, both of which operate as national institutes of their countries. The Eastern and Southern African Management Institute in Tanzania did not only survive the EAC but also retained and expanded its regional portfolio, attracting membership throughout eastern and southern Africa.

South Africa's membership to SADC brought with it several pilot training schools and the air traffic and navigation college amongst other civil aviation training institutes. The country also intends to establish a dedicated aviation college that would award aviation-related degrees. Namibia has also established an aviation school that intends to train pilots, mechanics and air

traffic controllers for the region.

Most airlines have their own training facilities where they teach technical, operations and commercial courses. In addition, there are private institutes which train on marketing courses like ticketing, using external international syllabi, examinations and certificates.

The existence of all these training facilities and approaches require a careful assessment to determine the way forward and ensure that the regional training objectives are achieved.

BRIDGING THE QUALIFICATION GAPS

To improve the training situation in SADC one would have to address and find solutions to all the issues that pertain to the current situation: the language problem; commonality of entrance qualifications to tertiary institutions; and ownership, management and operations of training institutions. In that regard, SADC has formed a Civil Aviation HRD Task Force that is charged with the responsibility to work on such solutions. The solutions should enable the region to effectively share resources and benefit from economies of scale. It must also address the following issues: harmonization of training; standardization of syllabi, course content and qualification; classification of training facilities; establishing mechanisms for upgrading and maintaining the quality of courses; and formulating methods and

standards for easy exchange of training and other personnel.

Harmonization of Entrance Qualifications

With regards to basic education, at least two countries require equivalent of British A-levels for entrance to tertiary institutes, while the rest would accept O-levels or equivalent qualification. These differences cannot be removed overnight: they have to be staggered into a programmed change. Whereas the long-term goal could aim at establishing A-levels as the entrance requirement to a civil aviation course, interim measures could prescribe an alternative to allow candidates that do not have such qualification to enroll. For example, those with O-levels could attend a bridging programme of one year to upgrade their qualifications to the common higher level.

Bridging the Language Gap

The differences in Language could also be treated in a similar manner with English, as the essential language for SADC aviation since it is the global aviation language and it is also an official language in eleven SADC Member States. Therefore, for the purpose of training and to facilitate communication among aviators, all trainees should learn and be able to communicate effectively in this language and in a second language that could either be French or Portuguese. In the interim period a one-year intense English course could assist those who do not speak it. In the long run, English should be compulsory for O-Level certificate in every SADC country. Additionally, every

pupil should study Portuguese and/or French.

Developing Education and Training Standards

The aviation syllabi in the SADC member States are based on the ICAO standards. This notwithstanding the region is in the process of harmonizing the different country syllabi into common SADC syllabi. In the same endeavor the formats of aviation education and training standards of all SADC member States have been consolidated into a common approach which is being processed for inclusion in the regional program.

SHARING OF RESOURCES

The training institutions that exist in the region are at different levels of development and complexity; but they all stand to benefit through co-operative ventures. Their mutual involvement in training will ensure commonality of programs, standards and qualifications and more productive deployment of available resources. It will also pave the way for joint programs with other regions and foreign organizations.

The region intends to establish a network of regional training centres after evaluating all the existing centres to determine which ones should be included in this network and at what level. The centres should be able to exchange instructors and conduct joint programs on their own or in collaboration with strategic foreign training institutions. It should be possible in the long run to enter into joint ownership of these centres by public and

private entities from different SADC and foreign countries.

CONCLUSION

Whereas it is a noble course for a group of developing countries like SADC to co-operate in training the require human resources for the aviation industry, there are several issues that need to be adequately addressed for this effort to succeed. For this reason it is necessary to set realistic, reasonable, challenging and attainable goals for the short, medium and long term.

In the case of SADC three issues stand out conspicuously: differences in language, enrollment qualifications and therefore syllabi; and lack of adequate facilities. The regional approach has to address all these, involve all member States and provide solutions that will respectively benefit the short,
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medium and long term. SADC has formed a Task Force to carry out this assignment and intends to encourage public, private and foreign partnerships in not only formulating the necessary policy and strategies but also in their implementation.

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